

## Color Psychology

How Colors Impact Moods, Feelings, and Behaviors

By [Kendra Cherry](#), About.com Guide

*Colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions. - Pablo Picasso*

Do you feel anxious in a yellow room? Does the color blue make you feel calm and relaxed? Artists and interior designers have long understood how color can dramatically affect moods, feelings and emotions. It is a powerful communication tool and can be used to signal action, influence mood, and cause physiological reactions. Certain colors can raise blood pressure, increase metabolism, or cause eyestrain.



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Of course, your feelings about color can also be deeply personal and are often rooted in your own experience or culture. For example, while the color white is used in many Western countries to represent purity and innocence, it is seen as a symbol of mourning in many Eastern countries.

Why is color such a powerful force in our lives? What effects can it have on our bodies and minds? Continue reading to further explore the history of color including how it's used, the effects it may have and some of the most recent research on color psychology.

### What Is Color?

In 1666, English scientist Sir Isaac Newton discovered that when pure white light passes through a prism, it separates into all of the visible colors. Newton also found that each color is made up of a single wavelength and cannot be separated any further into other colors.

Further experiments demonstrated that light could be combined to form other colors. For example, red light mixed with yellow light creates an orange color. Some colors, such as yellow and purple, cancel each other out when mixed and result in a white light.

If you have ever painted, then you have probably noticed how certain colors can be mixed to create other colors. Marion Boddy-Evans, About.com's Guide to Painting, has an excellent overview of [color theory basics](#)<sup>1</sup> including how different colors can be mixed.

### Color Psychology - The Psychological Effects of Color

While perceptions of color are somewhat subjective, there are some color effects that have universal meaning. Colors in the red area of the color spectrum are known as warm colors and include red, orange and yellow. These warm colors evoke emotions ranging from feelings of warmth and comfort to feelings of anger and hostility.

Colors on the blue side of the spectrum are known as cool colors and include blue, purple and green. These colors are often described as calm, but can also call to mind feelings of sadness or indifference.

### Color Psychology as Therapy

Several ancient cultures, including the Egyptians and Chinese, practiced chromotherapy, or using colors to heal. Chromotherapy is sometimes referred to as light therapy or colourology and is still used today as a holistic or alternative treatment.

In this treatment:

- **Red** was used to stimulate the body and mind and to increase circulation.
- **Yellow** was thought to stimulate the nerves and purify the body.
- **Orange** was used to heal the lungs and to increase energy levels.
- **Blue** was believed to soothe illnesses and treat pain.
- **Indigo** shades were thought to alleviate skin problems.

Most psychologists view color therapy with skepticism and point out that the supposed effects of color have been exaggerated. Colors also have different meanings in different cultures. Research has demonstrated in many cases that the mood-altering effects of color may only be temporary. A blue room may initially cause feelings of calm, but the effect dissipates after a short period of time.

Studies have also shown that certain colors can have an impact on performance. Exposing students to the color red [prior to an exam](#)<sup>2</sup> has been shown to have a negative impact on test performance. More recently, researchers discovered that the color red causes people to [react with greater speed and force](#)<sup>3</sup>, something that might prove useful during athletic activities.

**Poll:**What's your favorite color?

1. [Black](#)<sup>4</sup>
2. [White](#)<sup>5</sup>
3. [Red](#)<sup>6</sup>
4. [Blue](#)<sup>7</sup>
5. [Green](#)<sup>8</sup>
6. [Purple](#)<sup>9</sup>
7. [Yellow](#)<sup>10</sup>
8. [Brown](#)<sup>11</sup>
9. [Orange](#)<sup>12</sup>
10. [Pink](#)<sup>13</sup>

• [View Results](#)<sup>14</sup>

#### Choose A Color to Learn More

<a href="#">Black</a> <sup>15</sup>	<a href="#">White</a> <sup>16</sup>	<a href="#">Red</a> <sup>17</sup>	<a href="#">Blue</a> <sup>18</sup>	<a href="#">Green</a> <sup>19</sup>
<a href="#">Yellow</a> <sup>20</sup>	<a href="#">Purple</a> <sup>21</sup>	<a href="#">Brown</a> <sup>22</sup>	<a href="#">Orange</a> <sup>23</sup>	<a href="#">Pink</a> <sup>24</sup>

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